DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 813 RC 008 618

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TITLE The Revival of Population Growth in Nonmetropolitan America.
INSTITUTION Economic Research Service (DOA), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO ERS-605
PUB DATE Jun 75
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Birth Rate; *Change Agents; Decentralization; *Futures (of Society); Industry; *Population Growth; *Population Trends; Recreational Activities; Retirement; *Rural Areas; Rural Resettlement; Rural Urban Differences; Senior Citizens; State Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Urban Rural Migration

ABSTRACT

Population grew faster in nonmetro than in metro countries of the United States between 1970 and 1973. This trend reverses the previous pattern of inmigration to cities. Among the reasons for increases in rural areas and small towns are: (1) decentralization of manufacturing and other industry; (2) increased settlement of retired people; (3) expansion of State colleges; (4) more recreation activity; and (5) apparent higher birth rate in nonmetro areas. Also, urban areas have become less appealing to many people, for under conditions of general affluence, low total population growth, easy transportation and communication, modernization of rural life, and urban population massings so large that the advantages of urban life are diminished, a downward shift to smaller communities may seem both feasible and desirable. Much new thought, therefore, is needed on the probable course of future population distribution in the United States, uncolored either by value-laden residential fundamentalism or by outmoded analytical premises. (Author/JC)

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The Revival of Population Growth in Nonmetropolitan America

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"... the huge rural-to-urban trend, the common pattern to U.S. population migration since World War II, has been reversed."

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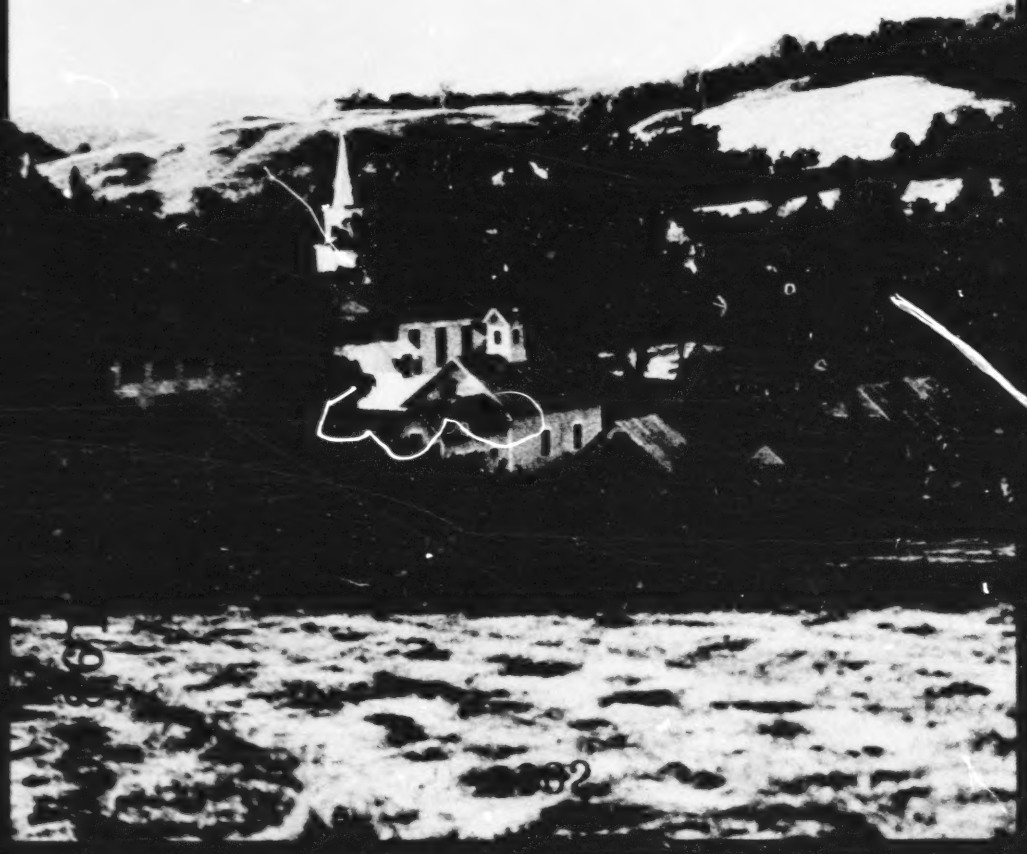

THE REVIVAL OF POPULATION GROWTH IN NONMETROPOLITAN AMERICA, by Calvin L. Beale. Economic Development Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. ERS-605

ABSTRACT

Population grew faster in nonmetro than in metro counties between 1970 and 1973. This trend reverses the previous pattern of inmigration to cities. Among the reasons for increases in rural areas and small towns are decentralization of manufacturing and other industry; increased settlement of retired people; expansion of State colleges; more recreation activity; and apparent higher birthrate in nonmetro areas. Also, urban areas have lost their appeal for many people.

Washington, D.C. 20250 June 1975

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"Under conditions of general affluence, low total population growth, easy transportation and communication, modernization of rural life, and urban population massings so large that the advantages of urban life are diminished, a downward shift to smaller communities may seem both feasible and desirable."

THE REVIVAL OF POPULATION GROWTH IN NONMETROPOLITAN AMERICA

by

Calvin L. Beale*
Economic Development Division
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The vast rural-to-urban migration of people that was the common pattern of U.S. population movement in the decades after World War II has been halted and, on balance, even reversed. During 1970-73, nonmetropolitan areas gained 4.2 percent in population compared to only 2.9 percent for metro areas. In the eyes of many Americans, the appeal of major urban areas has diminished and the attractiveness of rural and small town communities has increased, economically and otherwise. The result is a new trend that is already having an impact, one that modifies much we have taken for granted about population distribution.

The Old Trend

In the 1960's, the United States passed through a period of acute consciousness of the movement of people from rural and small town areas into the metropolitan cities. This awareness was greatly heightened by the urban disorders that began in Los Angeles and Detroit and culminated in massive riots following the 1968 murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. There was thus a racial context to concern about rural-to-urban migration, although suppositions about the rural origin of rioters proved largely incorrect. The racial aspect in turn was part of a larger national focus on the extent and nature of urban poverty, and of a growing sense of increasing urban problems of pollution, crime, congestion, social alienation, and other real or suspected effects of large-scale massing of people.

**Leader, Population Studies.* *This report is based on a paper presented at the Conference on Population Distribution, sponsored by the Center for Population Research, National Institutes of Health, Belmont, Md., January 29-31, 1975.*

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Although there is usually some lag in public awareness of social and demographic movements, it is still rather remarkable that it took so long for concern to develop over rural-to-urban migration and the extensive impact this movement had on the Nation's major urban areas.

Rapid rural outmovement had been occurring since 1940, with the beginning of the U.S. defense effort. It continued apace in the 1950's as farms consolidated and as the worker-short cities welcomed rural manpower. From 1940 to 1960, a net average of more than 1 million people left the farms annually (although not all moved to metro cities) and a majority of nonmetro counties declined in population despite high birth rates.

By the mid-1960's, this massive movement had drained off so much population previously dependent on agriculture and other extractive industries that the peak of potential migration was reached and passed. Yet, the impact of the movement had not been well recognized by cities or reflected in public policy. By the time that alarm over rural-to-urban migration arose around 1965, the economy of the nonmetro areas, as well as the social outlook and affluence of metro residents, were already changing in ways that would lead to a halt in the net outflow. Since 1970, changes in rural and urban population flows have occurred so rapidly that nonmetro areas are not only retaining people but are receiving an actual net inmigration as well—an event not anticipated in the literature of the day.

The Rural Exodus

In the 1950's, a net of 5 million people left nonmetro areas. In the South, farm population dropped by 40 percent in the decade, especially as a result of the mechanization of cotton harvesting and rapid abandonment of the cropper system of farming. By the mid-1950's, the Department of Agriculture began its advocacy of general rural development, urging communities to attract alternative types of employment. The emerging Interstate Highway Program began to shorten road travel times between places or entire regions. But only here and there in that decade were there actual population reversals from loss to gain in nonmetro areas—the beginnings of revival in the Colorado slopes; the start of recreation and retirement in the Ozarks; oil related development in south Louisiana; and the sprawling influence of Atlanta, Kansas City, or Minneapolis-St. Paul on accessible nonmetro counties.

In the 1960's, people continued to leave many of the areas of chronic rural exodus, such as the Great Plains (both north and south), the western Corn Belt, the southern coal fields, and the cotton, tobacco, and peanut producing southern Coastal Plain, especially the Delta. However, closer examination of these losses reveals that, in a majority of cases, rates of net outmigration or decline had diminished compared with the 1950's. Indeed, about 250 nonmetro counties in the South had net outmigration only in the black population, with the white population undergoing net inmigration into the same counties.

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Harbingers of Change

A clear-cut and major reversal of nonmetro decline occurred in two large upland areas of the South in the 1960's. One area stretched in an oval shape from St. Louis to Dallas, encompassing the Ozarks, the lower Arkansas Valley, the Ouachita Mountains, and northeast Texas. The other, of somewhat less dramatic size and reversal, was bounded by Memphis, Louisville, Atlanta, and Birmingham. Both areas were comprised heavily of districts with low previous income, low educational attainment, and low external prestige. Their reversal illustrated clearly the potential for rural turnaround in almost any part of the eastern half of the country once reliance on agriculture had been minimized. By 1960, only a sixth of the labor force in these two areas was in farming, after a rapid decline in the 1950's. They were major beneficiaries of the decentralization trend of manufacturing that gathered speed in the mid-1960's. The Ozark-Ouachita area also had extensive development of reservoir-centered recreation and retirement districts.

The great majority of nonmetro counties had greater retention of population in the 1960's than they had during the 1950's. Nonmetro counties of that day lost only 2.2 million people by outmovement during the 1960's, a reduction of 60 percent from the prior decade. Population decline was more common than gain in most counties where a third or more of the employed labor force worked in any combination of agriculture, mining, and railroad work at the beginning of the decade. In such cases, only a very rapid increase in other sources of work could fully offset continued displacement from extractive industry. But, because of this displacement, we entered the 1970's with far fewer counties depending primarily on the extractive sector of the economy. Thus, many more counties were in position in 1970 to see future gains in manufacturing, trade, services, or other activity flow through to net job growth and population gain, without being offset by declines in traditional industries.

Our best single source of population data for the 1970's is the Bureau of the Census county estimates series published annually. Accurate local population estimates are not easy to make. In some counties it is difficult to be fully certain even of the direction of change, much less the amount. Nevertheless, the estimates of the Bureau for 1966 (the only county series in the 1960's) caught clearly the turnarounds of that period in the Ozarks, Tennessee Valley, Texas hill country, and Upper Great Lakes cutover lands, although mistaking the direction of trend in the Mississippi Delta. The subsequent improvement of techniques, the strength of the demographic changes now occurring, and the support of independent data series on employment bolster confidence in the current series, although no one would prudently interpret small changes for small counties literally.[1]

[1] The 1973 estimates used in this paper are being revised by the Bureau of Census to reflect additional data that have become available. But the revisions will not change conclusions reached here. They will show less increase in nonmetro

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The Reversal

The remarkable recent reversal of long-term population trends is demonstrated by growth in nonmetro counties of 4.2 percent between April 1970 and July 1973, compared with 2.9 percent in metro counties (see table 1 which sums counties by current metro-nonmetro status).[2] This is the first period in this century in which nonmetro areas have grown at a faster rate than metro areas. Even during the 1930's Depression, there was some net movement to the cities. As late as the 1960's, metro growth was double the rate in nonmetro areas.

Table 1—U.S. population change by residence, 1970 and 1973

Residence	Population			Net migration	
	1973	1970	Increase 1970-73	1970-73	1960-70
	Thou.	*Thou.*	*Pct.*	*Thou.*	*Thou.*
Total	209,851	203,301	3.2	1,632	3,001
Metro[1]	153,252	149,002	2.9	486	5,997
Nonmetro	56,599	54,299	4.2	1,146	-2,996
Nonmetro					
Adjacent counties[2]	29,165	27,846	4.7	722	-724
Nonadjacent counties	27,434	26,452	3.7	424	-2,273

[1] Metro status as of 1974.
[2] Nonmetro counties adjacent to Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas.
Source: Current Population Reports, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Curiously, both metro and nonmetro classes had some net inmovement of people from 1970 to 1973. This is possible because the total population grew, partly by immigration from abroad.

During the 1960's, nonmetro counties of today were averaging a 300,000 loss per year from outmigration. Thus far in this decade, they have averaged a 353,000 inmovement per year while metro areas, in sharp contrast, have dropped from 600,000 net inmigrants annually to 150,000.

A common first reaction to these data and the basic change they indicate is to ask whether the higher nonmetro growth might not just be increased spillover from the metro areas into adjacent nonmetro counties. To examine this logical

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population retention in the western Corn Belt and the Wheat Belt than is implied in the data used here, but more such retention in a number of Southern States and scattered other areas of predominantly nonmetro character.

[2] In general, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas—here called metro areas—are designated by the Government wherever there is an urban center of 50,000 or more people. Neighboring commuter counties of metro character are also included in these areas. All other counties are nonmetro.

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question, nonmetro counties were classed by whether or not they are adjacent to a metro area. As might be expected, adjacent counties have had the higher population growth since 1970 (4.7 percent) and have acquired about five-eighths of the total net inmovement into all nonmetro counties. However, the more significant point is that nonadjacent counties have also increased more rapidly than metro counties (3.7 percent vs. 2.9 percent). Thus, the decentralization trend is not confined to metro sprawl. It affects nonmetro counties well removed from metro influence. Indeed, the trend can be said especially to affect them. Their net migration pattern has shifted more than that of the adjacent counties, going from a loss of 227,000 annually in the 1960's to an annual gain of 130,000, a shift in the annual average of 357,000 persons. On a slightly larger base, adjacent counties have shifted from an average annual loss of 72,000 persons in the 1960's to an average gain of 222,000 from 1970 to 1973, an annual shift of 294,000 persons.

Increased retention of population in nonmetro areas is characteristic of almost every part of the United States. As measured by migration trends, all States but three (Alaska, Connecticut, and New Jersey) show it, and two of the three exceptions are controlled by events in military-base counties. Nonadjacent counties have had some net inmigration in every major geographic division.

There were still nearly 600 nonmetro counties declining in population during 1970-73, but this was less than half as many as the nearly 1,300 declining in the 1960's. The largest remaining block of such counties is in the Great Plains, both north and south. Former large groups of declining counties in the Old South and the southern Appalachian coal fields have been broken up except in the Mississippi Delta.

Factors Affecting Growth

Major centers of nonmetro population are found in counties with cities of 25,000-49,999 people. These counties contain a little more than a sixth of the total nonmetro population. Their growth rate for 1970-73 was 4.2 percent, identical with that in all other nonmetro counties. Thus, recent nonmetro population growth has not gone disproportionately into counties with the largest nonmetro employment centers. Since these counties have a favorable age structure for childbearing, their rate of natural increase was higher than that of the rest of nonmetro counties, but the rate of inmigration was lower.

At the other residential extreme are the completely rural nonmetro counties that are not adjacent to a metro area and have no town of even 2,500 inhabitants. Such counties have been subject to population decline in the past. In the 1960's they had considerable outmigration and declined by 4.5 percent in the decade. However, from 1970 to 1973 their population grew by 3.0 percent. This is below the nonmetro average but reflects a definite reversal of the previous trend. Natural increase of population in the completely rural counties has been very low since 1970, because of the comparative shortage of adults of childbearing age (resulting from past outmigration), and the growth of older populations of higher mor-

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Table 2—Nonmetropolitan population change by selected county characteristics[1]

Characteristic in 1970	Number of counties	Population					Net migration			
		Number			Percentage change		1970-73		1960-70	
		1973	1970	1960	1970-73	1960-70	Number	Rate[2]	Number	Rate[2]
		Thou.	*Thou.*	*Thou.*	*Pct.*	*Pct.*	*Thou.*	*Pct.*	*Thou.*	*Pct.*
Counties with city of 25,000 or more	138	10,351	9,936	8,916	4.2	11.4	148	1.5	-74	-0.8
Counties with no city of 25,000	2,356	46,248	44,363	43,850	4.2	1.2	998	2.2	-2,922	-6.7
Entirely rural nonadjacent counties[3]	620	4,401	4,272	4,474	3.0	-4.5	123	2.9	-551	-12.3
Counties with 10 percent or more net inmigration at retirement ages[4]										
15 percent or more	377	8,672	7,887	6,655	10.0	18.5	646	8.2	619	9.3
10.0 to 14.9 percent	214	5,310	4,728	3,764	12.3	25.6	509	10.8	642	17.1
Counties with a senior State college	163	3,362	3,159	2,891	6.4	9.3	137	4.3	-23	-.8
Counties with 40 percent or more employed in manufacturing	187	8,852	8,369	7,419	5.8	12.8	265	3.2	78	1.1
Counties with 35 percent or more employed in agriculture	263	8,936	8,647	8,057	3.3	7.3	73	.8	-294	-3.7
40 percent or more	193	916	919	1,039	-.4	-11.5	-12	-1.3	-201	-19.4
35.0 to 39.9 percent	104	398	402	463	-.9	-13.3	-8	-1.9	-100	-21.5
Counties with 50 percent or more black population	89	518	518	576	(5)	-10.1	-5	-.9	-102	-17.6
Counties with 10 percent or more military population	98	1,750	1,763	1,947	-.7	-9.5	-67	-3.8	-459	-23.6
	29	1,172	1,177	955	-.4	23.2	-66	-5.6	21	2.2

[1] Metro status as of April 1974.
[2] Net migration expressed as a percentage of the population at beginning of period.
[3] Nonmetro counties not adjacent to Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas.
[4] Counties with specified 1960-70 net inmigration rate for white persons 60 years old and over, 1970.
[5] Less than .05 percent.

Source: U.S. Census of Population 1970 and Current Population Reports. U.S. Bureau of the Census.

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tality as retirement settlement spreads. The growth in these counties has come principally from inmigration, with a rate nearly double that of counties with cities of 25,000 or more people.

The decentralization trend in U.S. manufacturing has been a major factor in transforming the rural and smalltown economy, especially in the upland parts of the South. From 1962 through 1969, half of all U.S. nonmetro job growth was in manufacturing. However, population growth has not been high since 1970 in areas with heavy concentration of manufacturing activity. Counties with 40 percent or more of their 1970 employment in this sector contained about 16 percent of the total nonmetro population and grew by 3.3 percent between 1970 and 1973. This increase required some net inmigration and was slightly above the total U.S. growth rate, but was well below the increase of 4.2 percent for all nonmetro counties. Thus, although growth of manufacturing has been a centerpiece of the revival of nonmetro population retention, the recent reversal of population trends has not been focused in areas already heavily dependent on manufacturing. Growth of jobs in trade and other nongoods producing sectors has now come to the fore. From 1969 to 1973, manufacturing jobs comprised just 18 percent of all nonmetro job growth, compared with 50 percent from 1962 to 1969.

A second and increasingly important factor in nonmetro development has been the growth of recreation and retirement activities, often occurring together in the same localities. Recreational employment is not easily assessed, but by means of net migration estimates by age, it is possible to identify counties receiving significant numbers of retired people. Using unpublished estimates prepared by Gladys Bowles of the Economic Research Service in joint work with Everett Lee at the University of Georgia, counties were identified in which there was a net inmigration of 15 percent or more from 1960 to 1970 of white residents who were age 60 and over in 1970. Migration patterns at other ages were disregarded and may have been either positive or negative. These counties, which had already become a source of nonmetro population growth in the 1960's, are by far the most rapidly growing class of nonmetro counties in the 1970's.

Although a number of the retirement counties are in the traditional Florida and southwestern belts, it is the spread of retirement settlement to other regions that is a key characteristic of recent years. Clusters of nonmetro retirement counties are found in the old cutover region of the Upper Great Lakes (especially in Michigan), the Ozarks, the hill country of central Texas, the Sierra Nevada foothills in California, and the east Texas coastal plain. In general, coasts, lakes, reservoirs, and hills are favorite locations.

"Retirement counties" is probably too narrow a label for a number of the counties described. In about five-eighths of the cases, inmigration rates were highest at retirement age and lower (or at times negative) at younger ages. But in the other three-eighths of the "retirement counties," inmigration was higher at some age under age 60 than it was above that point. These areas often attract younger families because of climate, or amenities, or because manufacturing or other employment may have begun to flourish as well. Indeed the very influx of

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people into attractive areas for noneconomic reasons can stimulate follow-on types of job development—a case of supply creating demand. Further, it should be noted that, for many people today, "retirement" may at first mean simply an optional departure from a career job and pension system at a comparatively unadvanced age; for example, most Federal Government workers can retire at age 55. Increasingly large numbers of such people then move to a different place where they may or may not reenter the labor force.

The nonmetro counties with net inmigration of 15.0 percent or more of whites at age 60 and over grew by an average of one-fourth in total population in the 1960's. The pace of their growth has risen further, with a 12.3 percent population increase from 1970 to 1973.

The very rapid growth of these counties suggested a look at counties with a more modest level of inmovement of older people. Counties of 10.0 to 14.9 percent retirement-age migration rates in the 1960's were examined and proved to have grown in population by 6.4 percent from 1970 to 1973. This is a little more than half the total growth rate for counties with higher retirement rates in the 1960's. However, the counties with modest retirement rates in the 1960's have had a relatively more rapid buildup in their total growth trend since 1970. During the 1960's, their overall growth of 9.3 percent was well below the national average, but their growth since 1970 is well above the national average. The two classes of retirement counties have between them 8.7 million people in 377 counties, and make up an increasingly significant part of the total nonmetro population.

An equal number of nonmetro people live in counties having senior State colleges and universities.[3] The expansion of these schools has been substantial since the end of World War II. Many have evolved from teachers colleges into major institutions. Some observers tend to denigrate the importance of nonmetro population growth stemming from college growth, as if it were somehow less real or permanent in its consequences than other growth. But the rise of nonmetro State schools has greatly increased availability and quality of higher education in nonmetro areas and has also made the affected towns more attractive for other development. In fact, many new metro areas over the last two decades have come from the ranks of college towns. From 1970 to 1973, nonmetro counties containing senior State colleges and universities grew in population by 5.8 percent, well above the nonmetro average, despite the slight national downturn in college enrollment rates that began at this time.[4]

Eventually, these counties should experience a drop in students as the decline in the birthrate since 1960 affects enrollment. But towns and counties containing State colleges are unlikely to return to their earlier size or status. Perhaps equally important to nonmetro areas has been the founding of numerous community

[3] The lists of retirement counties and college counties are almost mutually exclusive. Only 19 counties are in both categories.

[4] Private colleges are omitted from this discussion because they are considerably smaller than State schools on the average and have had much less growth than have State schools. Some private schools do, of course, exercise an effect on the nonmetro population.

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junior colleges and technical education centers. These institutions typically do not have residential facilities and thus do not swell the local population with students, but they have made it much more feasible for nonmetro residents to obtain post-high school education, and they are often able to cooperate with business firms in providing specific skills needed for new or expanded plants. More than 150 nonmetro counties acquired public community colleges or college-accredited technical education centers during the 1960's.

Tabulations were also made for two types of counties known to have been highly susceptible to loss in the 1960's. Heavily agricultural counties, with 40 percent or more of their employment in farming, were the most vulnerable to population decline and outmigration in the 1960's, losing jobs faster in the course of farm adjustments than other sources of work could be found. From 1970 to 1973, such counties declined by 0.9 percent in population, contrary to the general trend of nonmetro population. But the more crucial statistic about these counties is that they have only 400,000 people, which is less than 1 percent of the nonmetro population. Their trends now have little weight in shaping the national nonmetro trend. Counties where 35.0 to 39.9 percent of all workers are in agriculture contained a half million people and were stationary in population from 1970 to 1973. Heavily agricultural counties clearly are still different in population retention from the mass of nonmetro counties, and are not absorbing the equivalent of their natural population increase (their combined outmigration amounted to 12,000 people). Even so, they have been affected by the recent trend, for these same counties declined by 11.5 percent in the 1960's with a decade outmovement of 200,000 people.

Among the most uniformly heavy losers of population in prior decades were the nonmetro counties of predominantly black population. They were once disproportionately agricultural and they received less industrialization than the rest of the South. Further, their black residents had an impetus toward city migration that transcended what might have been expected from the dependence on farming or the slower pace of other job development. By 1970, 98 predominantly black nonmetro counties remained, although only one of them still had 35 percent or more workers in farming. These counties contained 1.75 million total population. From 1970 to 1973, they decreased by 13,000, or -.7 percent. Thus, predominantly black areas of the South have not yet shifted to growth. However, net outmigration has been reduced from an average of 46,000 people annually in the 1960's to 20,000 in the early 1970's. Some increased retention is evident.

Several other less numerous and less populated types of counties that had increased population retention can be identified, although no data are shown here for them. These include mining counties, counties with major prisons or long-stay hospitals, those containing State capitals, and counties with Indian majorities.

Increased retention is so pervasive that only one type of county could be found with diminished population retention. This type was military base counties—defined as those where 10 percent or more of the total 1970 population consisted of military personnel. Military work was a major rural growth industry in the post World War II decades. Military bases were disproportionately located in nonmetro areas, and they employed many civilians as well as armed forces. However, since

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1970, domestic military personnel has declined by about a fifth. Nonmetro counties with 10 percent or more of military personnel among their residents declined slightly in total population (-.4 percent), with a net outmigration of 66,000 people. By contrast, these counties grew very rapidly during the 1960's (23.2 percent).

In summarizing categories of counties for which trends have been computed, highest rates of nonmetro growth are found among retirement counties, counties adjacent to metro areas, and counties with senior State colleges.

Geographically, several commonly recognized subregions have had rapid growth. In the 3-1/4 years after the 1970 Census, the Ozark-Ouachita area increased by 9.4 percent, the Upper Great Lakes cutover area by 8.0 percent, the Rocky Mountains by 7.1 percent, and the Southern Appalachian coal fields by 6.3 percent. The latter is a remarkable turnaround from a loss of over 15 percent in the coal fields in the 1960's. Each of the four areas cited is comparatively remote from metro centers.

Residential Preferences

A change in attitudes may be of equal importance to economic factors in producing the recent reversal in migration. In the middle 1960's, we became aware of the great disparity between the actual distribution of the U.S. population by size of place and the expressed preferences of people. Millions of people presumed heretofore to be happily content in their big city and suburban homes said—in response to opinion polls—they would prefer to live in a rural area or small town.

When Zuiches and Fuguitt subsequently reported from a Wisconsin survey that a majority of such dissidents in that State preferred their ideal rural or small town residence to be within 30 miles of a city of at least 50,000 people,[5] there was noticeable discounting by urban-oriented interests of the message of previous polls. It appeared that basic trends were not being altered. Rather, only additional sprawl within the metro areas was implied. The validity of the point established by Zuiches and Fuguitt was indisputable, especially when confirmed in a later national survey by the same researchers. However, in the opinion of this writer, a second finding in the national survey greatly modified the significance of the preference for a close-in rural or small town location, although it received little notice. By a very wide margin (65 percent to 35 percent), the big city people who preferred a nearby rural or small town residence ranked a more remote rural or small town place as their second choice, and thus as preferable to the big city.[6] Therefore, most of this group were positively oriented toward nonmetro locations compared with their current metro urban residence regardless of whether an opportunity arose to relocate within 30 miles of the city.

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[5] James J. Zuiches and Glenn V. Fuguitt, "Residential Preferences: Implications for Population Redistribution in Nonmetropolitan Areas," ***Population Distribution and Policy***, Vol. 5 of research reports of the U.S. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, 1972, pp. 617-630.

[6] Glenn V. Fuguitt and James J. Zuiches, "Residential Preferences and Population Distribution," ***Demography***, Vol. 12, No. 3, August 1975.

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A second statistic foreshadowing the 1970-73 trends reported here appeared in another national survey done for the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future. This figure dealt with the likelihood that persons dissatisfied with their size of community would actually move to the type that they preferred.[7]

The Commission found that three-eighths of the people expressing a desire to shift to a different type of residence declared that they were "very likely" to make such a move within the "next few years." An additional fourth thought they would eventually make such a move at a later time. The "very likely" group would have translated into a potential of about 14 million people of all ages moving from metro cities and suburbs to smaller places and rural areas. The expectation of making a move was highest among comparatively young and well educated persons (where migration rates in general are highest), and thus was not primarily a nostalgic hope of older people of rural origin.

I suggest the pattern of population movement since 1970 reflects to a considerable extent many people implementing a preference for a rural or small town residence over that of the metro city, quite apart from the fact that improved economic conditions in nonmetro areas make such moves feasible.

Aside from demographic and opinion survey data, a variety of corroborative local information on the noneconomic aspects of current population distribution trends is now available in the form of newspaper and magazine stories and correspondence. The environmental-ecological movement, the youth revolution with its somewhat antimaterialistic and antisuburban component, and the narrowing of traditional urban-rural gaps in conditions of life all seem to have contributed to the movement to nonmetro areas.

Effect of the Declining Birthrate

An additional factor contributing to higher nonmetro population growth during a period of slower national and metro growth has been the course of the birthrate. The decline of the birthrate since 1970 has basically occurred in the most metropolitan parts of the country. In the 3-1/4 years after April 1970, for which most of the population figures in this paper are quoted, births numbered 5.2 percent less than for the previous 3-1/4 years in the Northeast (including Delaware, Maryland, and the District of Columbia), the North Central, and the Pacific States. On the other hand, in the South and the Mountain division of the West, they actually increased by 3.5 percent in the post-1970 period over the prior period. Although nonmetro residents are a minority in both of these two super regions, they comprise twice the proportion in the South and Mountain West than they do in the North and Pacific West (40 percent vs. 20 percent). It is highly unlikely that this contrasting pattern in number of births could occur without being substantially associated with the large difference in proportion of nonmetro popula-

[7] Sara Mills Mazie and Steve Rawlings, "Public Attitude Towards Population Distribution Issue," ***Population, Distribution, and Policy, op. cit.***, pp. 599-616.

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tion. It appears that the difference between average levels of metro and nonmetro fertility rates has somewhat widened since 1970, after three decades of convergence.

The 1970-1973 population trends do not reflect effects of the more recent large increase in the price of oil and gas products. Inasmuch as rural people travel a greater average distance to work or for goods and services than do urban residents, and do not usually have public transportation alternatives, the higher costs of personal transportation could have a depressing effect on the future trend of population dispersal. It is too early as yet to tell. However, the same shortage and higher price of fuels and energy-producing minerals has caused renewed mining activity for oil, gas, coal, and uranium, thus stimulating the economy of a number of nonmetro counties, especially in the West. In a directly related manner, the agricultural economy is being operated in a greatly expanded way, primarily to serve export markets and balance of payment needs. This, too, generates some additional rural employment.

Future Impact

How long will the 1970-73 trend persist and what is its larger meaning? One doubts that we are dismantling our system of cities. However, except for Boston, all of the largest U.S. metro areas have had major slowdowns in growth. The largest eight areas—which contain a fourth of the total U.S. population—grew by less than one-third the national growth rate from 1970 to 1973, whereas they were exceeding the national growth in the 1960's. Small and medium sized metro areas have had increased growth and net inmovement of people since 1970, and thus are behaving demographically more like the nonmetro areas than like the larger metro places. The trend that produced the turnaround in nonmetro population is primarily a sharply diminished attraction to the more massive metro areas, and a shift down the scale of settlement—both to smaller metro areas and small towns and rural areas.

Much is said in the literature of demography about the modern demographic transition. The process whereby nations go from high fertility and mortality through a period of rapid total growth as mortality drops, to a subsequent condition of low growth as fertility also falls, is seen to be accompanied by rapid urbanization. But in a nation where this process is essentially completed, another aspect of demographic transition may emerge, in which the distribution of population is no longer controlled by an unbridled impetus to urbanization. General affluence, low total population growth, easy transportation and communication, modernization of rural life, and urban population massings so large that they diminish the advantages of urban life—these factors may make a downward shift to smaller communities seem both feasible and desirable.

The trend in the United States since 1970 was not foreseen in the literature of scientific and public discussion of even 3 or 4 years ago. Its rapid emergence is basically the result of innumerable private decisions— both personal and commercial—which collectively and subtly have created a pattern of population movement significantly different from what went before. Long-held social truths—such

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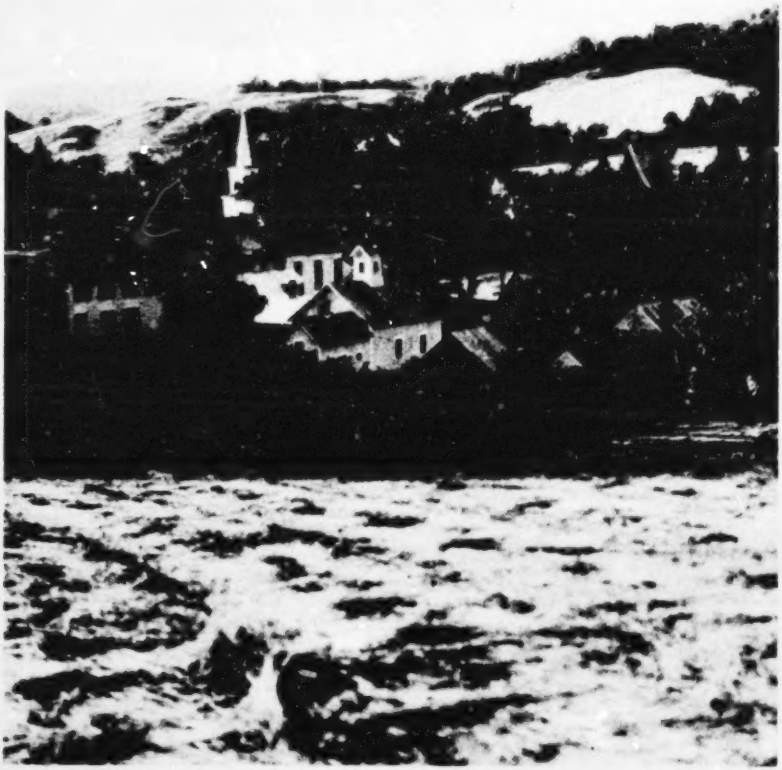
as the view that the basic movement of population is out of nonmetro areas and into metro areas—are not easily cast off. But this one seems to have reached the end of its unchallenged validity. Much new thought is needed on the probable course of future population distribution in the United States, uncolored either by value-laden residential fundamentalism or by outmoded analytical premises.



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